

## The Southern Strategy: Politicians, Tacit Coding and Euphemisms

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The leveraging of one's influence, political or otherwise, with the skillful use of tacit coding and euphemisms affects all of us. People employ this concept a lot more than they talk about it. For decades people have needed to say things, and at the same time deny that they said them. A good example is "the southern strategy."

"In American politics, the Southern strategy refers to a Republican Party (GOP) method of winning Southern states in the latter decades of the 20th century and first decade of the 21st century by exploiting opposition among the once segregationist South to the cultural upheaval of New Left, Vietnam protests, the Hippie culture, Gun control, Abortion and to desegregation and Civil Rights." (Southern, 2010) Essentially, it is a strategy or tactic or concept whereby euphemisms are used in place of words that are politically incorrect. The speaker and listener both know this is happening, but pretend otherwise.

Some writers refer to this concept as "dogwhistles," being "a word or phrase that conjures up certain subliminal images in those who are predisposed to see things" a particular way. "This is a complicated mode of communication ... The most famous of all was Ronald Reagan slyly beginning his campaign in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where one of the worst atrocities of the civil rights movement happened." (Digby, 2008) I will not digress to quibble over the word "subliminal," as this could be a whole 'nother topic.

"So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other." (Lee atwater, 2010)

"Copies of what is believed to be the only recording of then-Republican Presidential nominee Ronald Reagan's 1980 speech at the Fair has been donated to The Reagan Library and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History by a Neshoba County native." (Meyers, 2007)

After listening to the recording Reagan, I have discovered that tacit coding works in reverse from ordinary parenthetical qualifiers. With regular parenthetical qualifiers, the qualifier in parenthesis distinguishes the identical terms on the left. Take a gander below:

Digital reference ( <b>type</b> )	aka, <u>chat</u> , instant chat, instant message, live online reference
Digital reference ( <b>tutorial</b> )	aka, instruction through interactive online modules
Digital reference ( <b>e-mail</b> )	aka, electronic letters
Digital reference ( <b>VoIP</b> )	aka, speak, discuss, talk, <u>chat</u> (not to confuse with type)

If the above examples were too complicated for you, here's a few that are simpler:

tea party (**Boston Harbor**)  
tea party (**social gathering**)  
tea party (**red-neck**)

As I listened to the recording of Reagan, I noted a few euphemisms.

“party affiliation” vs. “how you feel now” (**less government / return to the past**)  
“balancing the budget” – “money” (**less government / return to the past**)  
“people can solve the problems” (**less government / return to the past**)  
“government beauracracy” (**less government / return to the past**)  
“state’s rights” (**less government / return to the past**)  
“change” (**less government / return to the past**)  
(Meyers, 2007)

As you will notice above, the qualifiers in parenthesis do not distinguish or qualify the numerous terms on the left. The numerous words and phrases on the left lead to the same sneaky message on the right. There is little to qualify, but I guess that’s the intent, as even red-necks in Neshoba County, Mississippi in 1980 could decipher these intricately combined coded messages. They must have been proud of their intellectual accomplishment. So much for “subliminal.”

This sort of coding is so sneaky that it sometimes is not until we have a deathbed confession, or some redneck at a tea-party or town-hall meeting overloading his/her mouth and letting the cat out of the bag (“I want my country back!”), that one can clearly show what is happening. (CNN Newsroom, 2009)

For tacit coding to be effective there must be some commensurate tacit knowledge, otherwise the speaker is just listening to his head rattle. If you are an ignorant red-neck, at this point your head is probably rattling are your are probably angry; in which case I suggest listening to yodeling David Peterson performing "RattleSnake Daddy" at the Holston Hills House Concert in Knoxville, Tennessee.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w\\_KBJmbi8k&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_KBJmbi8k&feature=related)

The technique of tacit coding is sometimes used to extract information from people, which means there is two-way communication. The southern strategy is only one-way, as two-way would have been too complicated for the good folks in Neshoba County. A good article about “tacit knowledge” with good references for same is Richard’s (2009), citing Cowan (2000), Polanyi (1967), Ambrosini (2001), Baumard (1999), Merriam-Webster (2009), Reber (1993), and Sternberg (1995). (Richard, 2009)

The Internet is replete with information about “subliminal messages,” which is a way of telling [or asking] someone something in a surreptitious way. In sampling, we must be a bit more creative—engendering a situation that allows the respondent or participant to tell us about something when we ask him about something else. This involves tacit coding of questions which the researcher and respondent must understand, as well as tacit coding of responses which they both understand. This can involve key words, themes, issues and patterns. The concept of tacit

knowledge is used in human resource management.

This general concept is sometimes called “discourse analysis.” (Daymon, & Holloway, 2002, discourse analysis pp. 140-146, tacit codings pp. 141, focusing on extended segments of language pp. 143)

### **Intellectual Slack Action**

Even in euphemisms that are coupled with the same tacit coding, there is slack or looseness between them. This is akin to the ‘slack action’ problem of trains. “In railroading, slack action is the amount of free movement of one car before it transmits its motion to an adjoining coupled car.” (Slack, n.d.) The longer the train, the greater the slack action. When ignorant folks are exposed in a short period of time to several euphemisms that are coupled with the same tacit coding, the motivation of each tacit code is compounded into the next, resulting in intellectual slack action. Politicians should be ashamed when they engender intellectual slack action among our less fortunate.

### **Summary**

As God allows us to have language, He also allows us to use it to our own devices, or vices as the case may be. The concept of coding and euphemisms is an idea, notion, scheme, plan, information, and a way of conveying information. God may not be happy at how we use all of our information.

### **Respect for Opposing Views**

In fairness to opposing views, I will mention Shafer and Johnston’s (2009) “The End of Southern Exceptionalism” where they use election and polling data to show that the increasing Republicanism of the South has been primarily a response to the vast economic change in the region since 1948, and not a white backlash to the civil rights revolution.

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